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SUBJECT: POST-ELECTION SCENESETTER FOR CODEL DELAHUNT/MEEKS

¶1. (SBU) Representatives Delahunt and Meeks are already very familiar with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV). They will be the first congressional visitors to come to Caracas since their April 23-24 visit, and this visit comes on the heels of President Chavez's re-election on December 3. President Chavez won approximately 63 percent of the vote, while opposition challenger and Zulia Governor Manuel Rosales polled 37 percent. Despite a highly polarized political environment, the December 3 election took place without major incidents of violence.

¶2. (SBU) After his electoral victory, President Chavez underscored his intention to "deepen" the "Bolivarian revolution" and to launch "Socialism in the 21st Century," but he has not yet defined these political projects in any detail. Chavez said he will form a commission to propose amendments to the 1999 Venezuelan Constitution, one of which almost certainly will allow Chavez to run for president again in six years. He and his supporters are also discussing holding a party conference in the first four months of 2007 to try to merge all the pro-government parties into a "single revolutionary party."

¶3. (SBU) Rosales conceded defeat on election night in statesmanlike fashion. Despite losing by a wide margin, Rosales remains Venezuela's pre-eminent opposition leader. His campaign received high praise from all elements of the opposition, international observers, and even some Chavez supporters. Since his defeat, Rosales has returned to his Zulia Governorship, but he has also signaled his intention to continue to lead a united opposition. Rosales has named his own commission to propose changes to the Constitution. He and his followers are also planning to make their Zulia-based Un Nuevo Tiempo (UNT) a national party.

¶4. (SBU) The United States government commended the Venezuelan people for turning out in large numbers to exercise their right to vote and Governor Rosales for conducting an exemplary campaign in a difficult environment. In addition, we have expressed our interest in working with the Venezuelan government on issues of mutual interest. A/S Shannon and Ambassador Brownfield have publicly and privately reinforced that interest in recent days. Representatives Delahunt and Meeks will have a timely opportunity to test the BRV's willingness to engage on a practical, cooperative agenda.

BROWNFIELD